

THE MORALIZATION OF A SOCIETY: A GOVERNMENT TASK?

Recently "The Secret" was revealed to the world. This philosophy of life is gaining more influence everyday among people all over the world. The basic idea behind this way of thinking and living is, in order to attract success into your life – this could be material, health, emotional – you really have to believe it, and even visualize it. It's also important when these goals are achieved to give gratitude for achieving them.

One can ask, could "the secret" phenomena be applied to a society as a whole? And if so, whose role should it be? Is this by any chance a specific kind of "moralization" or the moral formation of a society?

During the 70's and 80's the Aruban society was struggling with the idea and the sentiment that others had our decision making process in their hands. This was a common feeling among locals and (almost all) politicians. There

was general consent that this situation was not in our best interest. This general consent eventually became the driving force behind local politicians and important actors that something had to be done. But change could not come about without the full support of the island community.

In 1986 the goal was achieved through the acquirement of a new constitutional structure for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Status Aparte for Aruba. It was a moral victory for the island. This constitutional instrument was important because autonomous decisions were now in the hands of local institutions. This boosted the moral and fortified the patriotic Aruban feeling.

From then on the island – political actors, business people, unions, captains of industry and most importantly the citizens – decided and chose for the "tourism-ization" of Aruba. The shift from an oil-based economy to a tour-

ism-based economy was stimulated by political discourse. The general consent was essential in the aforementioned achievements that led Aruba to its success story.

The two historical events – Status Aparte and "Tourismization" – were brought forward as examples to try to substantiate "the secret hypothesis". **Without the general consent that was stimulated by politicians and other actors, the goals set by the government could not have been achieved.** There were, without any doubt, other factors involved. The two examples however show **the importance of political influence on a community to choose for a certain path.** Political influence has a moral connotation attached to it.

The moral connotation derives from the moral values of a society. Moral values are defined by Danney Ursery as "beliefs or attitudes about what is important in life, good, right, desirable

and worthwhile". Other interpretations of these values are the care and responsibility, fairness and equality, freedom and courage, fulfillment in life, opportunity and community, cooperation and trust, honesty and openness.

The success of the role of the Government lies in emphasizing and encouraging moral values to society without interfering with the personal freedom of the citizens. The personal freedom has to stay untouched. This personal freedom as set in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 art 18, entitles every individual to the freedom of thought.

Governments or the State not only have a social, economic and political role to comply with, but have also a responsibility to educate and stimulate moral values to their local population. The power of government carries significant moral implications. As William Damon of the Brown University so rightfully puts it:

"In order to salvage the moral futures of our troubled youth, we need as a society to express a consensus of shared values rather than a cacophony of ethical discord and confusion. Young people need clear messages about what is right and what is wrong from all important people in their lives".

What role can the government then play in encouraging and educating moral values in this sense? As mentioned before there is a thin line between the education and stimulation of values to the society (what I called "moralization") and the personal freedom of every individual to think and express themselves freely. The success lies in finding the balance. According to Ryan Messmore (article September 2007) not everything should be a government responsibility:

"Government plays an indispensable role in a healthy community, but

this does not mean that everything a community needs to be healthy is government's responsibility".

The government should stimulate people to become better citizens, by creating the proper structure (or even infrastructure) where the individual can develop its best qualities and by protecting institutions that help to encourage virtue in society. Quality education institutions (schools), Centers for Information Technology & Arts, Training Programs, Achievement Incentives and High Quality Sport Facilities are just a few to mention. The stakeholders (politicians) should be role models to the youth, to become better persons in life. The "marketing" of successful local people, might have positive influence on the citizens in general. The political discourse has to become more positive. A true leader will guide its people into certain directions. On Aruba sadly enough the reality is like John Kubasiak puts it:

"Too many leaders at the top of our government and corporations were born on the third base but give themselves credit for hitting a triple".

The British Virgin Island government focused part of their policy on "preparing citizens and coping with life". Several goals will have to be achieved through the provision of, for example,

free basic educational services to secondary level students, the provision of financial resources to assist students at the graduate level and the provision of services aimed at the development of entrepreneurial skills.

Worth mentioning is that the proper implementation of the strategies requires the complete effort of all government departments and agencies. Successful implementation calls for an integrated effort in regulatory structures, the courts, the private sector, the non-governmental organizations and all the individuals. The political leadership has a definite role to play in setting the tone and preserving the environment under which the state can play its meaningful role.

Other important actors in this "spiritual project" are parents, educators, (sport) instructors, church leaders, politicians, institutions of civil society and business men.

Other countries also turn their political agenda and emphasize on moral values and positivism. Holland for instance has been redirecting its policies to more standard and moral values oriented ideas.

The time is right for leaders of this small nation to start concentrating on important moral issues. Coherent and integrated efforts, will lead without any doubt to desired goals. Really believing and even visualizing these goals will with all certainty lead to success. The youth needs our guidance, the elderly our support and Aruba needs you. ■

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